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Typography by Seán Jennett

EDITORIAL

At least two selections of the poetry of John Keats, one of Byron, and some new Shelley letters have come in for review during this quarter. They are reviewed on another page. But this may be the moment and the place to say a word about the romantics, the neo-romantics and changing taste in the poetry of today. Many must have wondered when turning over the pages of the new poets with good will why this term has been applied to them. Such a profound difference appears between a page of Keats, Shelley or Byron and a modern poem that two readers, according to age group and sympathy will shrug his shoulders and sniff 'unreadable'. There is not room here to give the reasons why the romantics and the neo-romantics approached the problems of technique and content from such different angles and what made their solutions radically different, but reasons exist. Mr. Read has probably discussed with the most clarity the classical and romantic antithesis. There are undoubtedly arguments from sociological standpoints and the similarity of position in the scheme of time, but there are also profound differences. One of these is that, in spite of what some in the provinces may feel, the poet of today is not nearly so isolated as the romantics were. He is much more aware of what is going on in the poetry world, has read and digested much more contemporary work, and his desire to have some effect on the society of their own time is much greater.

We wish our readers the compliments of the season and a Happy New Year. With 1949 *Poetry Quarterly* will have reached its tenth year of publication. The forties have seen the appearance of a great deal of very good poetry which will stamp it as important as any decade this century, for the development of English poetry. With our tenth anniversary we shall publish an anthology of poems from the magazine which should show a cross section of what has been written during the last ten years.

PIERRE EMMANUEL

On An Unknown Dead Man

Perfection's shroud plastered upon the bones
the eyes' last nakedness in absence clothed
the Soul all sweated out in blood, the Blood
gulped down with tears by some dishonoured Mouth
spitting its word out of the face of the Word's
pure lovers! Oh, to dawn in Death give praise,
tranquil upon the worn out body's shame
more earth's than night. What nakedness is barer
than the clay's, or older? This body lays
down its flesh and humbly giving it to earth
gives back all Flesh. O seaward hands! unnumbered
breast by Death staved in, I hear the seas,
the ancient seas, older than time, that shake
in you the wreck of all creation as they break.

translated from the French by Alexander Henderson
(From *Memento des Vivants,* Editions du Seuil, 1944).

Dawn

translated from the French by Alexander Henderson
(From *Sodome.* Paris, Egloff, 1944).

The dawn pure-eyed as though before the Word!
God plans a changeless perfect morning, suave
the sweetness of the plains upon His tongue:
slowly great shadows rise, the grave trees stand
quick in the naked air, supple the heights
of mountains tremulous beneath His hand.
The calm tide wakens one by one the fields
the earth lies waiting at the East's command,
and early risen man washing his eyes
of night receives God's kiss.

So true the light,
that mysteries of clearness fill the stones
and all unliving things are bathed in height.
The same in solemn absence man and tree
by the same gesture lift the golden veil!
Prayer is changed to crystal when the breath
startles the strange transparency. Now bells
are heard, and sound of shutters clear in the wide
serenity of light.

Far-off a shepherd
listens to their vast ringing on his path
close to his faithful steps. O noble season
when man feels everlasting as the Earth . . .

O foreboding! Be there blue to amaze
the innocent eye, God's wrath shall sift the time!
God chose this dear-loved irony of dawn
when wholeness almost swoons into His arms:
for irony is secret depths of pain
is birch-tree flute that fades upon the sight
finds peace in pastures' gentle green, in tender
music of flocks that climb, majestic, up
to cooling springs.

Already now the Angel
wild-rose hearted moves between the hedgerows . . .
Can all then be so simple, so unstoried,
the sky, the fields, the man in white amid
the orchards this day when Sodom is to die?

But God it is who knows, while see, the Angel
rejoices in the tender day, and sings!
Unhurrying is wrath in the sun's gold.

translated from the French by Alexander Henderson
(From *Sodome*. Paris, Egloff, 1944)

Courtesan strait of belly as a virgin
beneath lust's palmtree Sodom languid lies,
seasonless Sodom where dark summer reigns,
looking at God with wide unseeing eyes,
the terrible Face of grace lost in the sands,
beloved of the Angel still, perverted town,
so clear is evil in its pools, so calm,
to its elect the torrid city!

Who
knows not the little breasts where the sun sleeps
his heavy snake, the limbs with tedium veined,
unchanging fire where the blood's odour creeps
weary even to the stones, and gardens damp
with anguish where the unclean fountain leaps
that never from its shame shall free the earth:
who has not seen himself running beneath
walls' mocking eyes, and naked, breathless, pale,
fleeing his shadow drive a tunnelled wail
of murk through haggard streets of unreal faces
where frozen footsteps clash upon themselves
and none but the light-admitting dead advance?

MELLOY

Autumn Poem

The orchard apples drop in a cradle of grass
And I can savour the taste of broken stillness.
Above, in a flutter of breath, as it comes and goes,
A branch confers its blessing on the season.
O, how these autumn-scented trees combine
With my calm dreams in this embalming orchard,
Where, shepherd-like, my undesiring heart
Brims over with a vagrant early joy.

(Translated by DEREK STANFORD)

PIERRE REVERDY

Procession

Then on the sun mid-day began to sound
    Upon that enormous gong
A heavy fist was beating
Keeping in time with everyone's applause
And no one now continued lying down
Already the rays walked upright in the allies
Whose darkened bodies bloomed in crowns of light
And the day sank drowned in a tide of emerald air
    But when returning stars light up the passages
The porchways are all mean and the body is weary
Having to drag its lumbering shadow behind
    So now the surgeon's shining box is closed
On which one read the time of the next appointment
And the moon takes up its quiet night-watchman's round.

(Translated by DEREK STANFORD)

PIERRE JEAN JOUVE

Anan Ke

Woe to this wretched continent of Europe!
Woe to those haughty nations over-seas!
Woe to the gloomy suburbs and iron high-ways!
Woe to all vile aggressors throughout the world!

Woe to those towns with half-a-hundred stations!
Grey-beard debaters in their showy schools!
Woe to this vandals' den, this Western fungus,
Vaunting itself on the highest branch of time!

Fate and catastrophe shall overtake them:
Their meadows lie like bones deprived of flesh;
Their soldiers and their women shall die choking in their
    burrows,
And all their gilded pride fall prey to rust.

(Translated by DEREK STANFORD)

KENNETH PATCHEN

Lament for the Makers of Songs

Now the singers leave the darkened garden.
The rash and the holy are still, without light.
Hands, now slack as rags—they once held love.
Their instruments fall, and they rot on the ground.

Fools of God, they go.
The flowery tree is dead.
The cry of the bitter snow and
The giggling of pimps in a hangman's bed
Are the only songs I know.

The sun goes down on the reddening tide.
Chains rattle on a bloody rock . . .
This is the cross
    which man has made;
And this, the wheel . . . and the murder, the hunger
    the fear, and the pain
    which man has moulded
To the loss of his spirit, his reason, and his world.

The beasts are loose, inside. Our killdom's crime—
Man's will be done.
As he was in the beginning,
So shall he end, in slime.

O what is there to sing!
Man has conquered everything.
Hate stares out of every face.
The final victory is near—
And the baaing of the doomed as they toe
Their righteous marks in a butchers' race
Is the only sound I hear.

A Lost Poem

O now you've got a very different look.
What of the tree which the falling dark put faces
In, only a moment ago? and the light
On the sliding ground, what has become of its cold
Waking figures? O where is the lion that gazed
Down out of the leaves, and cried in pity as something
Beat its hands up through the grass and thrust
Its bleeding hands up through the grass? and the quiet
    Wings folded over the air
O where have they been taken? the chaste, unshadowed
Ghosts from a place far more real than our own.
How then did you come to me as I stood at the window?
    After a day of bitterness and sorrow
Why did you come? and the hair of my head rising up
And the breath in my throat like an eye that listened.
With the evening star you came, shining as a god—
And my thoughts like wounds from staring at nothing.
O something gathered growing in purity
Gathering me back to the naked Singer
To the wounded, angry voice calling the thunder down.
    But now you have a very different look.
And the bitterness and sorrow are back in me,
For your wondrous lion is a dog that howls next door—
(People are cruel when their lives are meaningless)—
And the moving stone, the thinking Staff—what the silence
Said
    O what something felt for my heart to feel
    O what something knew for my days to know
Gone,
All that is gone. The neighbours are getting drunk.
The radios are on full tilt. The tree's in darkness.
    O like a god you came, but a tongueless fool
Stayed.

Worth no more than a man's hard pride,
Hard ribs against his woman's side;
For both in the night's wild later stages
Are humbled by that sense of sorrow
Which underlies the mating touch
Of every living thing—for the touch
Of generation has death in it,
And a pride of this kind will be dealt with
In the usual way. Yet the will
To disguise the faceless beast on the sheet
Has made the star-born people, and guided feet
On the valley's shadowy roads—
where all,
Of course,
Are met with a sterner show of pride, and old
Queens and famous whores have been known
To jig about in somewhat drab apparel.

So—and it will hurt no one . . .
Be proud of the rider—
Just look at his horse!

ALEX COMFORT

Anacreon's Grave

Here and here they lie
whom I have loved before
I meet them in the streets
the women grown patiently old

Their bodies are the graves
of people former and gone.
Mine too, but looking out
through an apple-shrunken face

no-one can see himself.
The buried I is the same
under my old man's crust
but the women grow terribly old—

men do not age like them.
I have looked in the pool
where the road going up the hill
fringes a choir of trees

hairless and spavined, still
I like to be among girls
to make them shake like bells
at my new lecherous songs

giving to poetry
what I cannot take to bed.
But they lie here, and here
girls whom I held, their eyes

avoid the roadside pool
and do not meet my eyes—
yellow, unblaming eyes,
resigned, breastless and dead

and I remind myself
how once the round breasts lifted
the cloth, danced when they danced,
and I think of each one's body

and each one's colour and scent
that live longer in the mind
than names or faces live.
The names are epitaphs.

I am Anacreon's grave,
and I tiptoe by myself
as if the sound of my feet
might raise myself as a ghost

I tiptoe past myself
look in the level pool
through holes in a hairless face—
Anacreon's coffin-lid

a panel of wrinkled wood
but out of the coffin grows
a vine of poetry
long as a seamstress' thread

or the unforgotten hair
and I string their names like leaves
on a green tendril up
Helen and Eunoë

And wonder why they died
and I still talking of lust
all devilish old, and dead
as Anacreon's wooden face

I pass them on the road
a corpse who can walk and sing
and where if he had a mind
and their level eyes look back

from the unchanged I to the pool
yellow, unblaming, dead
who once had two round breasts
that moved in the hand like birds

And I do not ask them 'Love,
What have they done to you?'
It is simpler to know them dead
and pass without questions. Here

and here they lie; they were
beautiful in their life,
and to open that aching grave
embarrasses more than death.

RUTHVEN TODD

October on Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia

Yammering birds among the yellow leaves
And twisted brown across the still green lawn;
In front of the window the wisteria weaving
Its complex stems into an autumn awning.

Shortly the rose of sharon pods will scatter
Their unwanted seeds among the pansy plants,
The lilies of the valley and on the herb patch:
Insistently in spring the seedling phantoms

Springing up unwelcomed, to be rooted
Out, so that the summer's neatness is restored;
But now the horse-chestnut and maple shed too
Many leaves, and the house-owner deplores

The untidiness of autumn. With rake
And trug he must attempt to shift,
The dried and crumpled clutter which is breaking
The symmetry with which each place is gifted.

KENNETH REXROTH

Poem

I have closed my ears, I refuse
To listen to my mouth weeping.
I have closed my mouth, I refuse
The taste of my weeping eyes.
I have closed my eyes on the past
As you want it remembered for
The rest of life, called 'forever'.
I was not there. I was away.
At the Poles, in the Amazon.
I am not going to have been
Where you say I was. You fancy
You can force me to have lived
The past you want. You are wrong.

Poem

As the sun comes in the window,
And shines through the aquarium,
The water turns green in the light.
The swirling dinoflagellates
Make rockets in their own thick clouds,
Like the rockets that plunge along
The Yosemite waterfalls.
Lucretius, Leibnitz—I wonder—
Are there windows in the flagellates?
I muse over an inward picture
Of the meteoric dust
Floating in the black sea deeps
And eddying in the sunlight
In the stratosphere.

Poem

The tops of the higher peaks
Of the Sierra Nevada
Of California are
Drenched in the perfume of
A flower which grows only there—
The blue *Polemonium*
Confertum eximium.
Soft, profound blue, like the eyes
Of impregnable innocence.
The perfume is heavy and
Clings thickly to the granite
Peaks, even in violent wind.
The leaves are clustered, fine,
Dull green, sticky, and musky,
I imagine that the scent
Of the body of Artemis,
That put Endymion to sleep,
Was like this and her eyes had such
An inscrutable colour.
Lawrence was lit into death
By the blue gentians of Kore.
Vanzetti had in his cell
A bowl of tall blue flowers
From a New England garden.
I hope that when I need it
My mind can always call back
This flower to its hidden senses.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Donna Elvira

That stone death walking the castle corridors,
Whose clanking tread rouses the foxes' bark
Overhead in the high sierra, under a darkened moon,
And sends an echo to these worn battlements; his eyes
Are hollows of the grave, full of blue candles,
Clefts in the mountain's granite, where bright riders,
Black-horsed, with streaming hair, dash to oblivion—
John, it is you he is looking for. He is your fear:
The solitary spectre
Who roars in the labyrinth's centre, in a low vault
Where naked and alone you fight in dreams,
And start from your lover's arms, under a light sheet,
Moaning in sleep, while she lies quiet as a sea
And morning's fingers twitch at the dead curtains.

That striding man in marble I, too, have seen,
Who have known you, as they have never known—
Those others, others: the ladies moving
In Moorish gardens, bright as roses, light as fountains
Falling in laughter between the tamarisk hedges,
Or muffled at Mass with stars behind their veils,
For whom love was a dance on a glass floor,
Tricky, with peacock-steps, or posturings
Of the white-tufted crane beside a sunset pool;
Who tripped and fell, poor dolls, their jointed limbs
Snapped in the tangled wires the puppet master held.
Or the clustered nuns, murmuring like black bees
Home in their stone hive, in a white vigil;
Those virgins of the night, into whose dreams
You suddenly pranced, hot as a painted devil
Out of the picture-book; or simpering,
With your fake martyr's wounds, your sacred heart upon your sleeve,
Peeped from the saints' procession over the altar, soft-mouthed and meek
As any anatomical flayed Bartholomew,
Or young Sebastian hedge-hogged with arrows.

The peasant-girls, gossiping by the fountain,
Or silly as their geese at noon under the cork-trees,
Giggle and shrink, seeing your riding shadow
Skim on the pasture, your tall high-stepping horse
Galloping back to the predatory castle
Perched on the crags like a harsh-feathered buzzard.
For them you are legendary as that long-nosed goblin
Who skulks by twilight underneath the eaves,
Or the green-toothed ogre in the Goth-king's grave,
Snoring amongst his gold, who every May-day night
Claims a plump virgin for his supper there.

But I was proud-born of a metalled race,
And as a girl I dreamed a duke or a prince
To be my only husband; or else, perhaps,
Married in a long black veil, to lie alone,
A grove of cedars, where only the white Dove
Might come, and brood, and build his secret nest.
But when I spoke of this, Pasquita, our old nurse,
Combing my long locks by the firelight, would laugh,
and say:
"What, these to be shorn away! Lie cold, then, to the
cold moon!
No, girl—but these are snares
To catch some wild lover—the bandit-king,
Who will make you rich from his gold-cave in the
mountains,
And kidnapped countesses to be your waiting women;
Or the phantom huntsman who rides on windy nights
Over the hills, chasing the ghosts of kings."

But once, in the market-place
I peered between the curtains of my litter
And saw a gypsy-girl dancing among the crowd;
Flaunting like a flower her brown body, she fixed her eyes—
Eye of a gypsy, eye of a wolf—
Upon the man she wanted, and drew him forward,
Swaying her hips and arms, and her young breasts,
To the rhythm of castanets and clapping hands;
She seemed as ancient
As a goddess painted on a cave's flat wall
In red and yellow ochre; and beckoned him—
A tall young mule-driver—to love as to destruction.

Then my blood cried that I was one with her,
And one with the shifting moon, and the harsh sea,
And the hungry grave, and the last of all your lovers.

You have pulled down my pride. There is none left;
And my dreams shrivel like rose-leaves in the fire.
I have run barefoot up and down the streets
Like any raddled whore who's lost her swaggerer.
Your servant, too, has lead me by the snout—
That little man, with a weasle's nose,
Who scans the dry anatomy of your desires,
And has cast up, and ruled in his account-book
The profit and the loss of all your lust.
He knows you, too; therefore he, too,
Shall meet that stone death on the stairs, and live.

But now I am the black-faced moon that speaks to your
ebb-tide;
The Banshee, with a night-bird's voice,
Trailing my veils of shade, boding of death.
Be free then from my love, whose whimpering muzzle
Follows your heel no more. Another hand
Arrests your fingers on the passionate sword-hilt.
At last you have been caught; put a bold face on it—
A dirty schoolboy breaking bounds at night—
But I was the night, and I the apple-tree.
How transient you are—
Poor lord, poor lover, less than a ghost,
Who have no flesh and blood but our desire.

RICHARD TRUDGETT

Suicide Note

You unmade me many of you
Mist and shallow: I dragged the strings
Of seasons in a slackening spell: I plucked
The blood of streams that rose like clouds
And swarmed like flies across the darkening skull.
I bathed in waters where the ticking clocks
Hung from their distance in the throbbing ears
Like gongs that dragged their sound in years beneath
the seas.
I dreamt in valleys where the heart stood still
And all the day was darkness and the cups of death
Drained down their poisons in a silver light.
Within their flood I knelt and knew
The storming birds, the silence run to fallow,
All the crews and queens and crowing few
Swept by like tempests in their rutted beds of brain.
I heard the drum of swarming words
Swell like a torrent on the dying lips,
I heard their lies murmur like praise
And yet I searched beneath the waves
Searched for a living sun.
But my arms could not restrain
The falling rains. My veins
Reached into night and fell,
Burnt like a moth before the flame
That dragged through blood and paralysed desire.
I died, and like a moth, lay pinned
Upon a chart, ringed round with tears.

IAIN FLETCHER

Another Country

This is no hour for drunken violins:
the light of frost has such a clarity
being as calm and dulcet as his mind
in which these images of veneration stir.

It sees the echo sparkling on the frost;
the sleigh-children's laughter, the high horses,
the feathery fugitive trees
where the children sense the blossom of thanksgiving;
the druid pastures hourly hushed with ghosts
and water coiling under veins of ice.

On the faint winter mornings
the young girls shine through beauty,
their unbraided spirits,
the little blue veins lyric in their wrists.
And violins explore the evening
made crystalline with carols and with all
those limpid centuries of fruitful vigil;
the Host expected, lanterns on the lake,
men one with men in ceremony of search
for that most frail, most necessary joy.

Clothed in their first communion the white girls,
softest of feet which favour all the dew,
pass through the green bewilderment of dawn . . . .

Sonnet

. . . . Un dieu meurt au nadir . . .

The narrow world where time is ever solemn,
Where ritual silence clusters on the tree
And footfalls hollow earth's entire hymn,
Elides the eye, eludes the memory,
Risen and lonely as a single column
Under that uncrowned crest of sky.
(Was this a marriage with the seraphim,
Entrance to some lasting Mystery . . . . .?)

In rooms, in evenings' freckled light
The walls are ailing and a whisper falls
In fading cadence till its echoes toll:

So faintly out of space and touch and sight
In answer to the patience of the soul
Some prisoner—beyond all distance—calls.

Sonnet

. . . . . And in the loneliness which life must give,
(Because there are so many of the dead)
That open mystery through which we live,
Where Truth—a cometery petal shed
In the narrow night of all sensation—falls
Between one and another fugitive
Still flying from the same pellucid dread,
Ask only for uncouth memorials:
Not the Great Supper or the Ritual Dance;
Ask only to keep eye and heart awake
By the communion of a slender glance,
Since bread is stale before we break,
Since all have hands, but few have hands to take,
Since all have language, but none ever calls.

JAMES KIRKUP

To Death

Come, stranger I always dream
of telling, walk into my room.

The bed, the table and the chair
stand here for you, a window
curtained by a wall of brick,
a lamp that burns all day
my heart away. The floor worn bare
as a wheel revolves in the wind.
The narrow stair falls like a lock of hair,
the dado-belted wall sags in its paper bag.
Open wide this door, and you will open cliffs
on air, night, ruins, the dim height
and dizzy drone of the beaten street.

You, stranger, will enter through this door,
and I shall see the dead in the shop-fronts.
or the victors walking with hanging arms along
the distant pavements of the lost. You will share
this headline shelf with me, and if you
are what you ought to be, to you at least this little
will be enough, for it is more, by far,
than all my hungry brothers ever know.
Yes, you will come, and gaze into its skylit roof
and tread the turning floor, sit silent by the lamp,
weep at the burning table, sleep in my ocean bed.

And you alone will come to stay. If you, stranger,
are what you ought to be, you will not go away.

Elegy

No more a look, no more
a look into the strangest eye
that holds the mystery of mine
look-shrouded in a common thought.
No more the time
of day, the midnight chime,
the hesitation in the empty room.
No more the music fiddled in the brain.

No more the silent sand of joy,
the sea in the lonely bay, the boy
whose closed heart is a still
shell soundlessly shouting full
at the sea, with sound, when you hear it,
prouder than ocean-sound, louder than now,
than the dark steps of blood in the hollow head
at lingering night, in the heart's broken bed.

No more, no more, my lost, inconsolable lover,
the talk with the other mirror, fixed beyond good
and ill, naked and bright beyond error.
No more the chill of the mind's revolver,
hope's last coins trilled in the haunted pocket.
No more the wait beneath the lamp
under the falling brightness, for
a brightness that never falls.

Never, children, never, never, never more
the walk through the wood's tall doorways
opened for us by some other hand
that turns a handle in the sky
too high for us to see.
Only a moment, a moment more
is left to say farewell. No more
the gentle beasts, the legends, the repeated stars,
the sun, and the stranger who did more than smile.

Farewell, not for a little while,
but for ever more, farewell.

ALEXANDER HENDERSON

Nothing Shall Be Lost

Nothing shall be lost of the many places,
nor of the many times in which we lived;
still they in us and we in them continue,
and all is now conjoined which once was sequence.

Greater our present grows till our last day,
continually increased by hour on hour
of past acceded to our growth and store,
like rings centennial of ancient trees,
or water creeping softly to the well.

Still where I walked a thousand miles ago
my step repeated falls on pavements pale
as faded papers, cold as moonlight, ragged
with swaying lamps and the tattered wind's voices.

Behind that blind the filtered sun is honey
still where I once dreamed, and those slow far hours
dawdle and dangle their silk languid slipper,
and smile from pillows full of outstretched arms.

My voice is heard on the cold mountain calling
across the snow to her whom once I loved,
and still her answer trembles with her breath
against the icy air of the Earth's silence.

Into that silence softly have I fallen,
fallen through depth on depth of my past days:
so swift the plunges, the times and places crush
in suffocating multitudes upon me.

O weight of windows and your netted shoal of skies!

All times continue; numberless their voices
sounding still from rooms, from streets, from cities,
from roads and trains across a continent;
still am I there in all those times and places,
unchanged the gesture, glance, the speaking word.

Vast is my present, vaster yet will grow
with endless teeming lands of days and dreams,
with footsteps, faces, hands and doors at nightfall
awaiting now my destined future claim.

And all that shall be never will abridge
all that was and is, for nothing shall be lost,
neither the eyelid's flicker, nor the year
of pain, the rippling poplars of our joy,
nor that cold room whence hope of love was gone.

When all our store of past is used and spent,
when all the times and places we received
or ever could receive, are no more past,
we are the miles of greatest present, Death,
the moment when the tree has filled its shape,
when one last drop has brimmed the cistern wall.

JOHN WALLER

Charlatans, Dancers

Beyond the lights, whoever lives, is safe
From candles, stardust, all entrancing dust.

Never the sullen struggle; he who's great
Will find his way to that rich couch at last

Where land-locked limbs make joy crookedly brave
And to the eyes' embroidery add lust.

Charlatans, dancers, all who haunt a stage,
Find luck in shadows when the lights are lost!

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

The Man Behind The Door

TO ALL PW'S EX-RUSSIA

I

There can be nothing now
But a smell which remains
A smell of some distant murder
Of fear in a wooden hut
Of a bread ration gone mouldy
And a litre of water called soup.

The snow thickens, the quarries
Are still now, the unreturned,
The remainder quicken in the frost:
Blood runs out on the stones with
Shovels slowly moving:
A sudden cry in the night,
In the hut with thirty beds in it,
Some roughcut wood called beds
A sudden cry on waking up,
Having dreamed, and having been awoken.

Now with musket heads
And feet in bandages, earflaps
Which move when you walk, assume
The hysterical attitudes of birds,
About to fly, with wings broken,
Thin birds, scarcely awake,
Unfeathered, born of a wilderness,
The cities burned, the frost burned,
And the body out like a light.

Nothing now of our hymns
Our beautiful veiled consciousnesses,
Our poetry which ascends
In vigil or in action, nothing any more
Our death and regeneration, acceptance,
Waiting inside a locked house
With the lights on, the coffee almost ready.

Nothing our endurance in God,
Nothing our reason, our belief, our love even.
Nothing, that you happen once
Every so often, reminding others
That agony is, that compassion should be.

No agony, no compassion, no hunger.
The bridges over Elbe and Rhine,
And all your beautiful German rivers,
Your mermaids and your nightclubs,
Your metaphysics, and your magicians,
All become a smell
Which sustains your living ashes up
To the bridge, to the gasring, to the revolver.
Jump, inhale, shoot. Nobody will notice.
And we shall go on talking of
Sainthood, and endurance, and hunger,
With, above all, compassion. Above all, endurance.

When you return somewhere
Everybody will be decent
Charming and simple.
They will accept responsibility.
Boots will be supplied, after interrogation.
Train-tickets home, if that is known. They will
be interested
In your personal experiences in Siberia.
If you talk they will give you cigarettes.
Only be intelligent and, above all, decent.
Disinfectant will be issued, the smell
Must at all costs be restricted to those few
Who have gangrene, or bad feet, or perhaps
merely death. Only endure, the rest is easy.

If you find it cold, we never asked you to come
back.

II

There can be nothing now:
Your presence is given
Its measure as merited,
And if you cry out your voice
Is part only of the general hysteria, part
Of a particular grievance against infinity.

Your shaved heads are merely history.
Nothing the interrogation. Not interested.
Airfields, turbines, industry?
Not interested. Home? Mother? Wife?
A name on a piece of paper, passed
By a now obsolete censor. You are out.

You are out in a wilderness which is
No saint's void, no metaphysician's vacuum,
But an emptiness of noises
A blind man hears on awakening and conceives
As astronomical music hearing
Sound without instruments, or an old cripple
Playing a violin in a street somewhere
In the guts of Hamburg, the havoc of Cologne.

It is possible
That we who attempt to pull
Some harmony out of a tragic universe
And thus transform an element into thunder
Should penetrate your hunger, being full,
Should feel the cold, breaking your bone and
blood
As something within, some inner correspondence
Reflecting merely a single tragic concept?

Then there is nothing any more
But the smell you leave behind
Of murder in the house, with the lights out,
And a man running somewhere downhill
In soft worn rags called boots
And a great cry out in the dark,
A man whose name is million being broken
A man who somewhere looks back, and is afraid.

BERNARD BERGONZI

Fantastic Townscape

Klee should have drawn this town.
The streets are full of twittering machines,
the people are freaks, and like the back of an
enormous whale the ground goes up and down.

In the sky you see, to one side of Mars,
sitting astride the lewd old moon,
Mozart, bright angel of the world,
playing the harpsichord among the stars.

With a pet rhinoceros, obediently led,
a rich and lovely woman passes by,
and in the pockets of her lionskin coat
are the brains of children not long dead.

These she sells to willing buyers, and hence
is rich, and can afford five black servants
and the dearest flat in Town,
where she lives in unrestricted opulence.

While round the corner, where the rain has washed away
the buildings in a little square
and left it bright and empty as a silver plate,
Chagall's scalped fiddler once more starts to play.

And all the time, with a *fin de siècle* air
(though he has read Freud) the poet walks
the grey and tattered streets
in an attitude of wonder and despair.

EDGAR FOXALL

The Statues

The statues decay
in the avenue,
their worn smiles infiltrate
between the gusts
of autumn wind.
Among the falling leaves
a few chilled birds
fitfully sleep.

The lichen spawns
on the crumbling ruins,
the lizard keeps
tryst in the crannies,
and there, as night
bends her blue foliage low,
they have the pathos
of curious things;
these decayed kings
wrapped in their marble sleep,
where the madmen gather,
in the dusk, without ambition.

Exiled

How long, how long, these columns of my greatness
shall I with difficulty clutch? How long?
Cling, cling to straws, all politicians must,
like rats and aspidistras, come to dust.

This fear these now exalted moves, but once—
once, how they spoke of sickle, drill and spade,
the human symbols all should comprehend.
Dead men among the flowers, their bones with light,
being humble, should endure, and each rib made
to tempt the butterfly, illumine night.

And now their voices, stupid in debate,
forlorn as sirens in a thickening fog,
that once, on fire, roared in a thunder spate:
One field this world, these cities round us spread,
all shall be one, one shall all understand;
all shall at last be fed, as grass is fed—
the proletariate knows no fatherland.

Thinking of this and that, I trace the laws
of Machiavelli in each smug device;
beneath the sandalwood I see the lice.

Therefore, in deserts I do seek my fate,
the genuine vultures I appreciate.

IAN FINLAY

Postcard from Glenlednoch

For Derek Stanford

Since ours is not the rhetoric of mountains,
Romantic heather shawled in purple mist,
These raw moors sour the mind, and icy darkness
Seals up the fountains in the poet's wrist.

My verses all as bones are stiff and brittle
That might, and under your blue warmer sky,
Be fed on ennui, eclair, apple-blossom . . .
But, craving truth, must seek the hard and dry.

Bleak stone instructs the soul in nihilism,
And leaning firs whose meaning I have found
Means not the South, nor yet that silky ocean
Where Shelley floats, magnificently drowned . . .

Thus meagre faith surveys its landscape-token
Of which, as mind swings South, I send to you:
Signed with respect, and stamped with my friendship,
A poem,—perhaps! Or just a postcard view!

TESSA M. SILLARS

Snow Before The Sun

Out of the
    Silence of God
Speaks
The compelling Word,
To still the inattentive heart,
And fill it with the quiet sounds of growth
And motions of assent;
Not easy consentings to the speaking flesh
But the yea-saying of a wholeness that gives
Itself, an undemanding contribution
To all-knowing Will.

From the
    Silence of God
Learn
The glory of the spare and accurate word;
The hard necessity of refusal,
Sternness towards the firstborn, lest it distract
Far-flung attention with endearing ease,
Learn to distrust
The angled glances of the scrutineer
Wooing with the pride of scepticism;
And to reconcile
Contractions that contribute,
Affirmations that subtract;
School your tongue to utter equally
Doubts and certainties.

Towards the
    Silence of God
Move.
Imperative
For the poet and the Carmelite
The flight to the extreme.

Winter Seed

This is the season of arrested growth;
The figs are thorny
And the grapes are thistles;
Time hangs limp across the barren bough,
And shadows lose their anchorage
And swoop
In shapes
Anonymous and untranslateable:
Cold unspeaking parallels
Clench the fallow fields:
Earth and spirit suffer this muteness of the season
While the frost waits
For a halo round the moon.

Wind-search and the turning-tools
Correct the stationary times,
Expose the roots, which must be reached
By stern, attendant danger that resolves
The chord of procreation.

But there is sharper suffering ensuing
When the seed stirs
And the questions prick,
And the heart is weighted with imponderable
argument;
Directions, waiting on irrevocable choice,
Tear the tissue of impatient love;
The proud, majestic pains of growth
Open the womb.

But, when the roots push steadily towards
Conviction,
And the upward thrust moves near the flower,
And the plant is shaped to its predestined pattern,
Then the will of God is done
In yet another finished thing.

JULIAN ORDE

Two Dogs Old

Two dogs are dead, mother and son,
Both very old, in my lifetime.
Ten bird centuries are gone
And a grave-wide meadow of butterflies.

But I'll not be the oldest one,
Nor the last, and for all my doubt and shame
I shall not finally look uncommon,
And no-one tell my bones from theirs.

None know the hare's foot luck at heart,
Or what it followed, and if it turned back;
When difference is over, no need to speak,
And worlds are put out when eyes are dark.

Now, two dogs old, from the hill where I've come,
Where for a moment I am alone,
I can see years off as the mist is clearing,
Some men putting up a scaffolding.

IRIS BIRTWISTLE

We Are As Stream And Heron

Down mountain's heart the stream slimes
a warm wound making indelible tracks
cat-stretching over country fire
contracting under frost's undented pillow
a truant child heedless of circumventing bells
the sometime girl who glides through cloister
of bud and leaf in spring procession
then as the mother rocking a world of ships
and flotsom in resolute and majestic arms
binding men with ribbons of pity
giving the beggar his untarnishable crown
a royal road to lift the narrow slum.
The river rides under winter's gaunt arch

trees deliver their seasonal burden and summer
hangs a heavy head over the stark mirror
a cast stone wrinkles the patient face
salmon leap a late love in autumn streams
tinsel-spun the crescent coin falls
in enigmatic answer with head and tail
grazing fingers' ineffective net.

The lagging line lifeless
life-line with frail corpse float
sounding a cemetery of dreams and garbage
with lilies asleep beneath the scandal-stone
and where stream is swallowed by sea falling
into wave's whale belly and losing identity
a casual heron rises from grey sand
sets independent wings against sky's stair
and like a bored spectator climbs from sight.

MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH

Harvesting Mangolds

As if a battle had heaped the fields with carnage,
In this, the sober season of sepia earth
And sodden trees, clotted with weight of leaves
Yellow and wet as clay, they lie like skulls,
Livid and stained with blue, bald, maculate,
Shorn of the knot of leaves, dragged from the earth,
Awaiting the carts that drag them to the clamps
Where they are stored, shut close in their thatched grave,
Even as the precious dead, as the barrows on the hills
Hold the long-dead kings, their turquoise and their gold,
Smooth skulls, and the rough ridges of burnt clay
That hold the royal ashes. These too, like urns
Funerary, smooth as alabaster,
Glow in the mellow light, as if the sky
Burnt for their funeral, and, cut from bronze,
The horses plod across the gilded field,
Till the long shadows fall, sloe-blue and cold,
The night succeeds, and skull and root are one
In the grey negation of the moon.

PETER RUSSELL

1937

What was the longshore, the weathers, the peculiar
flutings,
And the marram-dunes distant from us there
Ankle-deep among worn-out cockle-shells on the shore?
What was the rock-pipit, the curlew, or the gulls
Mockers of marsh and shoreland, the buried cowrie
Leopard-painted and precious to a child's unrewarded
eye?
What was the foam and scud of the weary sea at night
Or the silence of deserted dunes icy from
Lack of sun? A child buried his eager
Hands in the midnight sand and lay for an hour
Listening to the sleeping earth and the restless sea,
And the occasional cries of waking unseen birds.
What were the shooting-stars, the summer-lightnings,
The gun-flashes portending war, and
The Lighthouse-beam all-night-revolving
The spoke of a wheel? The longeared owl, the nightjar
Spoke at descending evening of inevitable night
Silent and black, or lit by the pellucid moon,
To a scarecrow child frightened by the shore.
At dawn the assembling marsh-birds in innumerable
choir
Hidden in gun-metal air or the first gleams
Of light reflected from water lying like lead
Heavy on sand, and the land-birds too, small
Pencils of sound from stunted trees on the dunes,
Woke to the day: Day that was ordinary and difficult
To understand though the night's darkness was full of
prophesies.
What were the hidden bugles, the sun-spots, and the
sounds
Of the armies of heaven and hell marching on our
heads,
The voices in clouds, and the stupendous comet that
never
Came, and the eternally ominous rumbling of the sea?

THE POETRY OF DYLAN THOMAS

DYLAN THOMAS is predominantly a poet of childhood and the primitive. The themes to which he returns again and again are the themes of his own childhood, and the childhood of the race, his own beginnings and the beginnings of the world. So, too, the faults of his poetry spring from childishness, the bragging and strutting of the little boy above himself, of the clever lad sniggering at his new-found knowledge of the flesh and his childish superiority over those who have not had such a good view through the keyhole, and can therefore only half-understand the things he is talking about. With this equipment—his Freud's-eye view allied to an indomitable childishness—it is no wonder Dylan Thomas seemed something of an *enfant terrible* the moment he appeared on the scene, especially since he was quickly taken to Miss Stilwell's heart and championed against the philistine pundits of the Sunday newspapers. No less signal was his success in attracting the attention of the observant Mr. Grigson, who in his Old-Jane-baiting nook at Keats' Grove also welcomed the wild Welsh boy to the rather more arid pastures of New Verse. This was in the days before the last war, when Auden, Day Lewis and Spender were the thing, and the Left Wing was popular among the intellectuals. Dylan Thomas was accordingly talked about by everybody, read by a few, and, probably, understood by none. But he made some fervent disciples, whose footsteps have been muddying and confusing his singularly straightforward tracks ever since.

Today Dylan Thomas is no longer an *enfant terrible,* but an accepted younger poet. His new poems are to be seen quite frequently in *Horizon,* that arbiter of respectable progressive taste, and he is sufficiently accepted for the vitriolic Mr. Grigson to think it necessary that he should be punctured at his strong-point —his technique. Yet nothing much has changed about him. His course has been more single-minded that most. His technique has improved, and he has learnt to write with greater clarity, but his preoccupations are the same, and he still suffers from the desire to tell tall stories and conceal his real nature behind a knowing and prurient wink.

To some extent this is all to the good. His virtues and vices, as a poet, derive from a similar source. His vision is a sombre one; the adult world is a nasty one, and, if he leers at it, it is because

it deserves a leer; it is a world in which

A hand rules pity as a hand rules heaven;
Hands have no tears to flow.

Even in his celebration of the sensual world Death is dominant (the poem in which he uses the refrain 'And death shall have no dominion' is half childish boastfulness, half ironic); the only world which he looks on with any pleasure is the world of his childhood; a world which in spite of its terrors and superstitions remains rather marvellous, and which he deals with with a tender nostalgia,

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
In the sun born over and over,
I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace.

In his first book *18 Poems*, his poems are the most sombre of all; the first poem, which opens:

I see the boys of summer in their ruin
Lay the gold tithings barren,

sets the key with its contorted and vicious images ('We are the dark deniers'), its exposition of barren love ('Here love's damp muscle dries and dies, Here breaks a kiss in no love's quarry.') and its final hint of homosexuality and futility:

I see you boys of summer in your ruin.
Man in his maggot's barren.
And boys are full and foreign in the pouch.
I am the man your father was.
We are the sons of flint and pitch.
O see the poles are kissing as they cross.

In this and others of the earlier poems the images run wild (one might almost say they run wild with pain, with the adolescent's painful responses to a world that both fascinates and horrifies) and give that appearance of arbitrariness which at first caused his poetry to be confused with that of the surrealists; the meaning often is not clear, and is never clear enough; yet in the poem I

have just quoted that final stanza, with its sharp, disconnected sentences purveys with great skill the very dislocation it is aiming at—'Man in his maggot's barren,' 'I am the man your father was.' (one can hear the contempt in the tone; one is reminded of the broken speech of King Lear; it is essentially a dramatic poetry)—a dislocation also to be found, but expressed politically rather than sexually, in Auden's poem *Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys,* of which the first line of this poem is reminiscent, and which provides a singular parallel.

These first poems most of them explore in a rather crude way a theme which never entirely leaves him; the theme of birth. But it is rather more than that, it is the identification of birth, especially the birth of a manchild, with natural and historic processes; and death (the conclusion) is never very far away:

When the galactic sea was sucked
And all the dry seabed unlocked,
I sent my creature scouting on the globe,
That globe itself of hair and bone
That, sewn to me by nerve and brain,
Had stringed my flask of matter to his rib.

The references here are not so much primitive as primeval! But I do not intend to go into them all here. The lines are loaded (like a drunk, perhaps), and they are certainly not sufficiently explicit. Poetry works by suggestion to a great extent it is true, by reference and cross-reference, but Mr. Thomas' first poems are positively silly with hints and references, and one could spend a whole essay on the analysis of a few lines (any few lines). I here merely wish to draw attention to the type of identificatory imagery, and I will leave the milky way, the seabeds with their spawning ancestors, and the enigmatic rib to be picked up later. These, or similar references, recur frequently ('There shall be serpents in your tides' 'Your calm and cuddled is a scythe of hairs' 'He holds the wire from this box of nerves'); and the identification of the birth processes (the birth-pangs) of man and nature, and their close connection with and close in Death is nowhere more explicit than in the best known of his early poems, 'The force that through the green fuse drives the flower'. And here we have something very like the birth trauma of Dr. Otto Rank, where birth itself is the wound and the destruction, where the life-force is itself the horror, where, having left the womb, one's destruction has begun,

And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

Poem 14 'Light breaks where no sun shines' explores much the same idea in a more positive aspect, and the specific identification of birth with death is made more clearly in 'I dreamed my genesis in sweat of sleep'

And power was contagious in my birth, second
Rise of the skeleton and
Rerobing of the naked ghost. Manhood
Spat up from the resuffered pain.

There are a number of Biblical references in this book (Adam, the first man, etc.), and in the next, *Twenty-five Poems*, they increase. In the poem I have quoted which is about 'my genesis' in that term, indeed in the very lines I have quoted, there are clear references to the story of Christ ('Manhood spat up from the resuffered pain'). Mr. Thomas's vision of the world's beginning, and of man's, is inextricably bound up with the Bible stories, though it is equally certainly his own, and in *Twenty-Five Poems* their influence is perhaps greater than that of the organic processes of nature with which he first made his identification. He can hardly write a poem without some recognisable reference back breaking in ('This was the god of beginning in the intrincate seawhirl,' 'My wine you drink my bread you snap,' 'A serpent fiddled in the shaping-time,' 'John's beast, Job's patience, and the fibs of vision,' 'Manna for the rumbling ground,' etc.); yet his theme remains the same; Birth; Death; and is predominantly pessimistic,

The seed-at-zero shall not storm
The town of ghosts . . . . . .

Many of these poems are still very obscure, yet the obscure ones are by no means always the least powerful, and in many of them there is a welcome humour, as in

How soon the servant sun
(Sir morrow mark)
Can time unriddle, and the cupboard stone.
(Fog has a bone
He'll trumpet into meat)
Unshelve that all my gristles have a gown
And the naked egg stand straight,

Sir morrow at his sponge,
(The wound records)
The nurse of giants by the cut sea basin,
(Fog by his spring

Soaks you and you, my masters, as his strange
Man morrow blows through food." etc.

which for all its gristly metaphors and sinewy explorations of the familiar identification theme reminds one pleasantly of Old Mother Hubbard and Humpty Dumpty. Moreover its taut, tight form is illustrative of his virtues as a technician, and the experiments with form in *Twenty-Five Poems* were to bear fruit later.

Even in *18 Poems* Dylan Thomas was by no means solipsistic or narcissistic, and for all his exploration of birth and pre-birth, he could write

I would be tickled by the rub that is:
Man be my metaphor.

an avowal of a social consciousness of sorts. In *Twenty-Five Poems* there are a handful of simple poems (greater clarity was always desirable), bearing a more direct relation to ordinary life and familiar affairs, as well as more explicit statements of some aspects of his theme:

A worm tells summer better than the clock,
The slug's a living calendar of days;
What shall it tell me if a timeless insect
Says the world wears away?

The preoccupation with birth and death is also a preoccupation with Time. At the end of *Fern Hill* with its nostalgic memories of childhood, it is Time who is the villain. Time and God and the Life-force take on a kind of malign identity, and in 'The hand that signed the paper felled a city', it might be any of these that is referred to, or all of them:

Great is the hand that holds dominion over
Man by a scribbled name.

Yet at the same time it is the quite literal hand of any ruler who with

A goose's quill has put an end to murder
That puts an end to talk.

In these poems not only is the language clearer, but there is a concern for the public agonies of life in our time ('I have longed to move away / From the hissing of the spent lie'), where before it has all been for the private agony of having to be out in the world at all.

The Map of Love marks a new stage in Dylan Thomas' development; the poems are incomparably more mature, even though many of them still suffer from his besetting vice of unintelligibility. The earlier poems were concerned with his own and

the world's beginnings; in *The Map of Love,* though the themes are roughly the same, the emphasiss has changed. Hitherto the poet has been the passive sufferer of the fact of birth, of his own and the world's genesis, and he has been identified with the helpless manchild. In these poems he is an active participator in events and he writes not longer from the viewpoint of 'the urchin grief', but of the

> . . . . . *plagued groom and bride*
> *Who have brought forth the urchin grief.*

And at the same time as his birth-and-death theme takes on a new angle from his own love and parenthood, his memories of the past now begin to fix not on the time of birth-and-death, but on the time of boyhood,

> *When I whistled with mitching boys through a reservoir park*
> *Where at night we stoned the cold and cuckoo*
> *Lovers in the dirt of their leafy beds,*

and, without his poetry becoming any thinner or less psychologically intense, he turns more outward towards the world of events and a consideration of his own responsibilities:

> *On no work of words now for three lean months in the bloody*
> *Belly of the rich year and the big purse of my body*
> *I bitterly take to task my poverty and craft.*

It contains also (again an outward-looking, not an inward-looking poem) his magnificent elegy *In Memory of Ann Jones.*

These are the new things, but the old images are there in their hosts, and the old obscurity, and the old theme (from its new angle):

> *Rest beyond choice in the dust-appointed grain,*
> *At the breast stored with seas. No return*
> *Through the waves of the fat streets nor the skeleton's thin ways.*
> *The grave and my calm body are shut to your coming as stone,*
> *And the endless beginning of prodigies suffers open.*

The Map of Love also contains a number of stories, written in a fine sensuous poetic prose, all of which are legendary and primitive in theme. The themes are much what you would expect from his earlier poems, and though the best of them are good to read, I do not propose to dwell on them here. They are extremely Welsh and they are full of the kind of nature-identification I

wrote of in connection with his earlier poems and his dominant theme; the final story in the book closes with the words 'He saw the fork-tree breast, the barbed eye, and the dry, twig hand.'

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog is a book of autobiographical short-stories about his boyhood, delightfully written, and not a bit obscure, and which, quite apart from the merits of the stories themselves, throws a good deal of light on the background of his poems; a short quotation from *Patricia, Edith and Arnold* is enough to show their quality.

'He ran down the gravel path on to the upper walk of the park. "I'm spoilt!" he shouted, "I'm spoilt! Patricia spoils me!"

'Soon the park would be white all over; already the trees were blurred round the reservoir and fountain, and the training college on the gorse hill was hidden in a cloud.'

Dylan Thomas is at his happiest in these stories; and it is easy to see why in *Fern Hill* and others of his later poems such as *The Hunchback in the Park,* he returns to this time and its freedom, when he was one of the 'wild boys innocent as straw berries' and when

> *All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay*
> *Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys,*

and why too in these poems his language has a clarity greater than it normally possesses.

I am not going to deal at any great length with Dylan Thomas's most recent book, *Deaths and Entrances.* The poems in it show more variety, more clarity, and (even) more ingenuity in technique than he has shown previously. The deaths of war and the growing of his son, with the *Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait* and *Vision and Prayer* (a poem written on the model of George Herbert's angel wings) all fit in with, are prolongations of or amplifications of, his original theme (it is the Sun (as God) to which *Vision and Prayer* is addressed—the sun (the light), of course, plays a considerable part in the birth-death story). The two most interesting poems in the book, apart from *Fern Hill,* are, perhaps, *Paper and Sticks* and *To Others Than You,* because, like certain poems in *Twenty-Five Poems* they are simple and they have themes which are outside the orbit of his preoccupation. Dylan Thomas's chief virtue, apart from the sensuous richness of his language and his mere technical skill, seems to me to lie in the kind of simple, innocent observation which makes his autobiographical stories so good; and indeed in these descriptions and evocations of childhood he is unparalleled. His chief vice is pro-

lixity. In his worst poems and even in many of his good ones, for all one's admiration of the technical accomplishment, and for all one's appreciation of the difficulty of the theme, one cannot help feeling that there is too little concision, that words are wasted. And this failing, I think, goes with his preoccupation with the birth-death, so very visceral theme. *Paper and Sticks* is a very simple ballad, rather reminiscent in theme and style of a ballad of Gavin Ewart's: *To Others Than You* is a poem about false friendship:

That though I loved them for their faults
As much as for their good,
My friends were enemies on stilts
With their heads in a cunning cloud,

and they both belong to the group of poems with a more public significance ('I have longed to move away/From the hissing of the spent lie', etc.); they have clarity, which I think is altogether desirable. So has *Fern Hill.* And it is Time who is the villain:

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

This is an extremely moving (an adult) statement on the situation of childhood, and it is at one with his preoccupying theme; the child is green (i.e. alive, young, and also inexperienced, not in the know), but although he sings happily and does not know it, he is dying (because birth, in a sense, is death). When Mr. Thomas sees himself so clearly, when he is 'green', he is at his best; it is the same in *To Others Than You* where the friends are *unexpectedly* 'enemies' (and that is why their enmity seems heightened); and in *Paper and Sticks,* which again is the tale of a simple deception:

Sharp and shrill my silly tongue scratches
Words on the air as the fire catches
You *never did and* he *never did.*

In these poems Mr. Thomas has the innocent eye. He is not struggling in the meshes of life-in-death and death-in-life as though caught in the unexpected net. He is surprised. So are we. And in *Fern Hill* this element of surprise and greenness is present in a more ambitious poem, and a poem that *is* in the run of his preoccupation. I think that is the best possible augury for the future.

NICHOLAS MOORE

Byron For Today, selected by ROY FULLER (Porcupine Press, 5/-), *John Keats*, introduction and selection by RICHARD CHURCH (Phoenix, 8/6). *New Shelley Letters*, W. S. SCOTT (Editor). (Bodley Head, 10/6).

FULLER'S selection of Byron is thoroughly timely—of the three poets re-presented here, he seems to be the least familiar to modern writers, if not to modern readers. Fuller has a very worthy ulterior motive, to judge from his broadcast criticism, in giving us an introduction to Byron now—Byron bridges the gap between the poetry of Dryden and the idea of Romanticism: he has much of the social concern, the unforced colloquialism, and the command of satire which I think, and I believe Fuller thinks, to be influences which we need as a corrective

Byron's stature emerges better from selection than from the mass of his work, and Fuller, in putting emphasis on the social and satirical Byron, by-passes his sentimentality and his Gothicism. There is nothing else in English like *Don Juan*, and very little, except *Hudibras*, like *A Vision of Judgment*. How Byron would have enjoyed himself in scarifying the political and literary citizens of the present day—and how much of *Childe Harold* could be applied to a circular tour of the modern world—we can only guess, but in the Byronic approach there is a clue to one form which contemporary interpretation could take. *The Age of Anxiety* touches this technique, but Auden's puritanism stops him from enjoying the process of exposure. Incidentally, I would like to have heard Byron on the subject of the struggles of the proletariat and the Marxism which Fuller attaches, rather timidly, to his tail—if there was ever an Anarchist, Byron was one, a fact which Fuller's selection brought home to me for the first time, and Byron on Stalin would have been as good reading as Byron on other public figures.

As Byron to Mr. Fuller, so Keats to Mr. Church—this is a careful, sensible, sympathetic selection: while Fuller's book shows us Byron larger than his average work, Church's Keats is smaller, I think, than average. There is an emphasis on the accomplished and poetic, which, in Keats, are the weakest link, and apt, as Church himself admits, to be embarrassing. What is permanent in Keats is his awareness of nature and of literature, and of the fusion of both: what is missing is an awareness of man in any of his tragic or practical aspects. Church is too conscientious a critic

to use words he doesn't mean, and his description of Keats as noble and monumental in his thought is a measure of the difference between his personal attitude and mine. Either of those words would apply to Byron or Shelley, but only 'monumental' conveys Keats' preoccupation with the literary aspect of literature. It was this preoccupation which, in spite of his sensibility and technique, debarred him from equalling Shelley. He was the perfect example of a limited mind enjoying a great talent. 'A young writer of bad taste, but wonderful power and promise.' So Shelley, announcing the writing of his *Adonais* to Hogg, puts his finger on one of Keats' weaknesses. *Childe Harolde* and *Prometheus* by contrast reveal the other, isolation from humanity. Church's book is better, I feel, than most short selections in showing the immense resources of poetry which Keats squandered, but which still transcend both his own limitations and those of his attitude.

With the Shelley letters I cannot deal in detail, but they are about the most interesting documents of the kind that I can imagine. They re-create the circle in which Shelley lived, his personality, his eccentricities, and the growth of his thought more clearly than biography can do.

Summarising, then, these three books, I would say that Fuller's selection of Byron is a book to give both to those who do and those who don't claim familiarity with Byron's work, particularly if they happen to be writers. Church's selection of Keats is as sympathetically presented as one would expect it to be, coming from him, a book—no offence—for beginners, for the adolescent if he is of the type who communes with nature (but Byron if he is the hard-boiled and revolutionary adolescent) and for adult readers who need to renew contact with Keats. Shelley's letters for all well-informed readers. A good many book tokens might be expended on these three, according to taste. All their editors deserve congratulations.

ALEX COMFORT

John Keats: The Principle of Beauty, LORD GORELL (Sylvan Press, 7/6). *John Keats*, selected by J. MIDDLETON MURRY (Nevill, 12/6). *Catullus, The Complete Poems*, a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary by JACK LINDSAY (Sylvan Press, 9/6).

No English poet except Shakespeare has received more uncritical adulation than John Keats. With Shelley he has been generally discovered by the very young and kept in the undusted chamber of the memory where the young heart's first idols are left behind convenient curtains. It would be difficult to find a poet who shows more examples of language discarded by our contemporaries. To Keats a poet was a bard, and he had to lie down on the sward. The odd thing is that with all this loading of ores with the pinchbeck of Leigh Hunt and the detritus of Spenser Keats was no fool. Some of his lines such as leaving poetry to a little clan have the ring of eternity and profound truth, but they are all the same encircled in a paper frill from a Christmas cracker, the gaudy and cheap imitation Gothick flowers which were the food of the isolated youth of the Romantic era. Lord Gorell's little book sketches the history of Keats' rise from the obscurity of his own time to the silly adulation of the turn of this century. Fourteen years after his death his publisher felt he could not risk printing 250 copies of his poems. It was only in 1840 that he appeared alone and not in the company of Coleridge, Wordsworth and others, and not till *The Life and Letters* of Moncton Milnes which appeared in 1848 that Keats began his astronomical ascension to first place in the English heart. He owes his fame then to the Victorians, and there is much in common between the poetry of the steel engraving and early Victorian views on life and art, and the poetry of Keats. Mr. Middleton Murry, a critic of first-rate ability in spite of his emotional overtones and lack of balance, has to admit the influence of Keats on the Pre-Raphaelites. He is hostile to it and for him Rossetti is a pale and inferior imitation. It seems now more than likely, in view of the re-examination of the Pre-Raphaelites as a whole, that later generations may come to restore the balance very much in favour of Rossetti. At the same time it must be said that Keats himself was critical of much of his own work and not unaware of a certain mawkish and cloy-

ing sentimentality. There is certainly today a change in taste. The present century has given due appreciation to *Troilus and Cressida,* preferred Don Juan to the more wordy and rhetorical triumphs of Byron. And Keats' *Cap and Bells,* dismissed by Lord Gorell is now reinstated by Mr. Murry as very worthy of our attention.

We know a great deal about Keats from his letters. Keats will, in fact live by the portrait he has created of himself in the letters, whatever later generations may think about his poetry. Of Catullus we know nothing except what we are able to reconstruct from his poems. But that is a great deal. Catullus was very much to classical poetry what the romantic poet was at the turn of the nineteenth century. He was intensely conscious of his solitude and of his status as a poet, opposing his individuality to society. Cut off from the living tradition, from a myth now no longer a reality that he can accept he has to make his tragedy into something new in which the conflict can be stabilised. Catullus is intensely modern because his problems bear much resemblance to our own and he solved them much as we have done, and not as Keats who fell back, except in his letters on the glittering ornamentation of a dead past. Catullus was one of the New Poets who were attacking the obsolete forms of long-winded old men, developing the new possibilities of language. His life, his relationship with Clodia, the Lesbia of his poems, his death from consumption are as romantic and illuminating as anything the last hundred and fifty years can give us. Mr. Jack Lindsay's translation is all the more welcome for the fact that there is no other, not even a school crib. His profound knowledge of the background of this period make the whole tragedy of Catullus' life and poetry a living thing.

WREY GARDINER

ROSETTE AND ROSE

The Traveller Has Regrets by G. S. FRASER (The Harvil Press and Editions Poetry London, 8/6); *The Kiss of Stars* by JOHN WALLER (Heineman, 7/6).

MANY a young poet, before maturity, discovers that his style, even more than his thought, is exercising an influence upon the verse of his contemporaries. This effect is, generally speaking, in the nature of a stimulant: a force that liberates rather than constrains. The other type of influence; namely, a restraining one, is usually exerted by an older writer (by an Eliot, say, or a William Butler Yeats). For once, however, it rather looks as if something of this corrective force is to be exerted by a younger poet, whose tacit call to order comes unsupplemented by those various political and social appeals that so often buttress the classical position. I refer to the poet and critic G. S. Fraser.

From the debauch of utter formlessness in which so much of the poetry of the 1930's was involved (a curious *réchauffé* of 'automatic writing', of blank-verse far too blankly comprehended and free-verse much too freely understood) Fraser was one of the first to turn away to compositon in stricter stanza form.

Along with these stream-lined strong-point poems went other poems, in his first book, written with a kind of casual nonchalance attaching to Nicholas Moore's early phase. This loose nonchalance has now become a matter of controlled and easy elegance, whilst the hieratic stiffness of his more formal stanzas (akin in certain qualities to those of Maurice James Craig, though with rather more weight, more substance than the latter's) has gained a new suppleness.

In spite of these 'artificer' concerns, there is small chance of Fraser ever devolping into a vacantly formal poet. As he writes in his poem *To the Death that is the Muse of Adolescence:*

> *Without this concept of the shapeless, no shape:*
> *Without your gulf at the edge, no edge to living!*
> *But I shall not be lyrical now about* your *prestige . . . .*
> *I have felt the taste of nothing on my tongue.*

John Waller is a poet as different from Fraser as the proverbial chalk and cheese; for whereas the latter is reflective and not averse to argument, Waller is spontaneous and instinctive; and even his colloquial and idiomatic syntax cannot quite disguise the lyrical trait. By this I do not mean to suggest that his verse is

deficient in thought, but rather that this thought results from intuition and not from analytical reason. His acumen, of course, is none the worse for that; as, for example, when he suddenly tells us

Pity is for a friend not for a foe
And rises from the heart not from the brain.
A clever pity can breed only fear.

For myself, I incline to find his poems somewhat lacking in 'the full resounding line' (an absence of which Dr. Johnson remarked in the verse of Edmund Waller, his ancestor); though when he writes of a submarine-crew, experiencing in times of war 'some green surrender far from loves', or proclaims of the airman shot down in battle, 'it is the body not the legend dies', we may perhaps find here tokens of the future.

'Every true poet,' observed George Darley, 'has *a song in his mind,* the notes of which, little as they precede his thoughts . . . do precede, suggest, and inspire many of them.' Such a song I find hinted at; sometimes emerging but often over-laid, in Waller's long poem *The Kiss of Stars*—a most feeling composition, and one which bears the stamp of unusual promise.

DEREK STANFORD

ACCENTS, ULSTER AND AUSTRALIAN

by ROBERT GREACEN

No Rebel Word by JOHN HEWITT (Muller Ltd., 7/6). *Notes from a Journey* by HARRY ROSKOLENKO (Meanjin Press, Melbourne, 5/-).

NATIONALISM, in the more secure countries, seems to be splitting up into its components—hence regionalism. Despite the advertised efforts of lady elocutionists (trained by the Poetry Society?) to 'eliminate accent and dialect', the regional poets at least are unmoved. Some of the Scottish poets, Norman Nicholson and Howard Sergeant among others in England, and one or two leading Welsh writers, are foremost in regional activity in these islands. Ireland no longer has *nationalist* poets in the old sense, possibly due to the fact that the greater part of the country—at the time of writing—is about to become a Republic and the struggle for national independence is less acute. Northern Ireland (or Ulster) has the

advantage of constituting a physical and political unit; the majority section achieves cohesion through being British by descent and Protestant by religion. This battlefield of Gael and Planter, of Non-conformist and Roman Catholic is John Hewitt's region, of which he says:

> *This then my country, not parturient,*
> *but boulder-sterile, cragging harsh and bare,*
> *not the round-bellied meadow indolent,*
> *or the healed gashes of the loving share.*
> *There is no crop or seed to know my hand.*
> *No sod responds. Thought wanders spare and lean*
> *across the whin and heather of my land.*

In these lines one sees the nearness of the Ulsterman to the Lowland Scot, his ancestor.

Hewitt has a ready wealth of natural imagery. Behind the freshness of phrase is the townsman who has explored the countryside, bringing a sophisticated (but not sated) eye and ear to the country's vistas and sounds. Yet the verse fortunately is not loaded with too great a burden of unusual plant-names and does not become a collector's exercise in spotting flora and fauna. The typical line exhibits an evenness of motion and the best ones are beautifully crisp.

The vocabulary is rather different to that of most contemporary English poets. Words like 'kibes' abound, good sound Elizabethan coinage that has disappeared from much spoken English; and then there are grimy, pithy Scots words brought across the Irish Sea by the seventeenth century colonists. Yet in the middle of all this virile speech one is amazed to find apparent poetess-like affectations—'limewasht', 'bankt' and so on. Why should a fine poet bother with this sort of language? In later published work—unfortunately not included in this small selection of a prolific, twenty year output—Hewitt has used more frequently the gusty Ulster phrase and dialect, the genuine bagpipe music of the province. The English reader would find this work much less difficult than Scots Lallans, for the Ulster vocabulary is not so large and most turns of speech are self-explanatory from context.

What distinguishes Hewitt's verse from the nice, quiet 'innocent eye' pastoral stuff is the hard core of intellectualism beneath the natural description. Only God can make a tree, but only a very good poet can write of tree and rock and clay without a self-consciousness that will embarrass a literate reader. Hewitt is aware of and concerned with the predicament of man, both in

the general sense and in the particular. This concern carries most conviction when implicit:

Once walking in the country of my kindred
up the steep road to where the tower-topped mound
still hoards their bones, that showery August day
I walked clean out of Europe into peace.

Infrequent thistle and ground ivy here
still signal life amid a world's despair.

He lacks success in his one or two overtly idactic pieces—for example, the most ambitious, *The Ruins Answer:*

can we presume a politician's peace,
tooled with grave saws and text-book instances,
ordered statistical benevolent
or listed precendent . . . .?

This kind of writing—its aim direct and sharp-thrusting—can be much better done by another Belfastman, W. R. Rodgers, the radio dramatist. But in the main Hewitt wisely sticks to what he (and he alone) does best. Hewitt's themes are those of the classic English pastoral poets; Clare and Edward Thomas obviously belong to the acknowledged masters. Rooted in the English tradition he is yet a regionalist, a voice that speaks firmly and insistently for his native Ulster. The Second World War has, if anything, re-inforced his acceptance of nature and of man's transience in it. *No Rebel Word* ought to be bought.

Harry Roskolenko, an Australian living in the U.S., has already published three volumes of poetry. The work printed in this pamphlet collection consists mainly of satire. Despite a certain evocation of homeland I should hesitate on this evidence to pronounce Roskolenko definitely a regionalist. Here and there good lines and stanzas stand out, though few of the poems form successful units. One of his most susatined poems opens with these stanzas which show control and an unhackneyed approach:

It is any hour of Thursday now at home,
The circling shades of morning are turning lightly;
The glaze of summer shuttling familiar streets,
Dresses the city in temperate gravity.

This ship, leaving the Celebes, the arching windy
savannahs,
Floats in the tick of clocks to the clock's stop.
A gulf of iron spring, a flowering green emblem
Streams form the sea where dolphins leap and drop.

THE UNITY OF DAVID GASCOYNE

Of the ways in which a poet can catch the attention of his contemporaries there are, briefly speaking, but two: either he attracts them by reason of his matter (the subject and his attitude towards it) or by his verbalization of this—by what is generally termed his manner. Now neither of these two forms of attraction provide, of themselves, a guarantee that the work in question, however successful in its appeal to the public ear, is, therefore, on that account, possessed of a permanent literary value: it may, indeed, prove but a passing fashion.

The sole means, then, by which we can decide the presence or absence of literary merit is by enquiring in what degree a poem is possessed of style. Here, it is necessary for us to make a provisional distinction between style and manner, or mannerism—as I prefer to call it—which is what the world assumes to be style. Now manner or mannerism, I should say, exists in that property by which the poet impresses himself on the minds of his readers as an individual and novel-minded being; and consists of a sort of self-advertisement, discreet or blatant as the case may be. This power, of itself, it will be seen, makes neither for a good or bad poetic manner; since its nature is essentially that of a personal rather than a literary talent. Accompanied by a feeling for words, and by a sense of literary form, it results in genuine and durable poetry. Without these qualities, the 'personal-manner' poem achieves its short success and is straight away forgotten. Style, on the other hand, I should define as the means by which a poet introduces a continuous and comely inter-play of sound into the entire texture of his poem, so that it stands not only as a work of personal or private self-expression but, in addition, as a work in which we may call the self-expression of language. This concept of style, I am well aware, places a somewhat unfamiliar stress upon the auditory aspect of a poem; but since the days when a poem was taken for granted as something to be read aloud, the proof of which resided in the hearing, have all too surely passed away, my point of view will prove, perhaps, a timely reminder and corrective.

If this has appeared a circuitous prelude to my speaking of the work of David Gascoyne, it has seemed, none the less, necessary to my task; since certain critics are of the opinion that the high esteem in which his verse is held by a larger though not inclusive public is not, in fact, due to its literary merit which they are apt

to depreciate, but to its embodiment of the time-spirit—the way in which it articulates a contemporary attitude widely felt but very rarely consistently expressed. I, in my turn, by immediate quotation, shall attempt to discredit this criticism; since however interesting a poet's thought may prove, its value—unless it go hand in hand with durable literary excellence—belongs to the analysis and history of thought and not to the analysis and history of letters. Whilst readily admitting, of course, the extent to which Gascoyne has succeeded in enunciating the *weltanschaung*—that ink-black world-attitude—of a generation, I wish to insist, apart from this, on the merit of his verse considered as to its pure qualities of style. Here, one citation must suffice; though nearly any page of his book, *Poems 1937-42*, will furnish examples of phonetic richness, of that high concatenation of congenerous sound-groups, the presence of which in any poem might well be said to return a positive answer to what we may term the Wasserman test for verse. The following passage I have chosen from a piece entitled *Dichters Leben*:

He knew how the extremity of night
1 2 2
Can sterilize the final germ of faith;
32 4 1 4 2
Appearance crushed him with its steady weight;
1 32 2
Futility discoloured with its breath
4 2 3 2
His tragic vision. All his strength was spent
3 2 3 3 32 2 3 2
In holding to some sense from day to day . . .
2 3 1 3 3
Slowly he fell towards dismemberment.
3 4 2 3 31 1 1 2

[In these seven lines we find a run of four letters: m, t, s, and f; indicated here, for quicker recognition, by a number placed immediately beneath each one. Thus the 'ms' marked with a 1; 'ts' with a 2; the 'ss' with a 3; and the 'fs' with a 4.]

Appraised by a somewhat hasty reader, the above passage might not appear as endowed with any particular gift of style. There are none of those virtuotistic flourishes, none of those patented eccentricites, paraded with such affectation and pride, and which the work of Auden, Barker, and Thomas have all too often manifested. As opposed to this crude outward display, the

style of Gascoyne is seen to be formed from certain internal harmonies of sound, which I hope my method of under-scoring will serve to bring home to the least observant ear. This acoustic interweaving is permitted no endless free-play in the poem, as similar devices are allowed to attain in the works of our more melomaniacal poets, but is strictly subdued to the poet's theme; both personality and literary dexterity being subordinated to the argument. 'His pattern,' writes R. L. Stevenson, speaking of his ideal literary stylist, in words that well apply to Gascoyne, 'his pattern, which is to please the supersensual ear, is yet addressed throughout and first of all, to the demands of logic . . . Pattern and argument live in each other.'

Having demonstrated, by example, this poet's unobstrusive distinction of style—that property by which, alone, we are right in considering a poet as poet—I next desire to show how Gascoyne's writing reveals a remarkable unity; implying, here, by this last word, certain consistent over-all traits, pertaining both to thought and technique, to subject-matter and its treatment. Indeed, those basic problems in Gascoyne's work, which fix his attention as a human being and demand his expression of them as a poet, can truly be spoken of as obsessions rather than problems. In other words, there is none of that impersonal approach to the questions at issue in his work. The man and the artist are not detached beings whose experiences are separate and respective affairs. With Gascoyne, the experience and reaction of the one go hand in hand with those of the other. His poetry, then, does not result from occasional and dilettante moments of living, but from the pressure of the poet's whole existence, whose major misgivings and dilemmas it voices.

In order to convey an idea of this unity, I shall resort to his earlier works, both little known and unavailable today, and attempt to show how his development has not been achieved—as it is with many poets—by any desertion of his earlier themes, but by a gradual perfecting of them; a bringing of them into closer cleaner focus; a pin-point positioning of their essential nature.

All Gascoyne's work would seem to stem from a centre of deep subjectivity; and in his novel *Opening Day** (published when the poet was only seventeen) the chief and, indeed, the all-but-only character reflects on the nature of self-identity, of personal and only personal awareness, in the words of the following

*Published by Cobden-Sanderson, 1933

passage: 'Reality is in the mind. It is only the mind that apprehends external objects that gives them their reality. It is impossible to imagine the world utterly empty of human beings—that is, of human mind—because to imagine that one has to think of it . . . There would have to be *one* consciousness, one conscious apprehension existing in order that such an otherwise empty-of-humanity world should have reality . . . This paper, this pen, this room round me with its pictures and its books, the rain stopping outside the window—none could have existence simply in itself, without my apprehension of it, of them. So only my mind is real.' This, philosophically speaking, is, of course, the position to which a mind of subjective and idealistic bias, deprived of Berkeley's *deus ex machina*, the world-sustaining mind of God, is, of necessity, driven. More important for our present purpose, however, is its psychological implication; for to hold such a doctrine and *feel* it true, as something temperamentally self-evident to one, as a constitutional belief within the blood, is to have one's sense of destiny and knowledge, of one's own and the world's happiness and fulfillment, totally dependent upon one's state of mind—a condition which makes for great exaltation or profound despondency and despair. It is also a lonely sort of faith to hold, a segregating credo—an hermetic persuasion.

For the fortunate few, endowed by nature with larger sums of energy, for those possessed of mental vigour or funds of animal confidence, such a belief as the one described, with its greater initial strain on the nervous well-being of the believer, might prove a stimulating conviction, enlarging the sense of their own mental stature. Gascoyne, however, is not such a one. Imprisoned in the bell-glass of his own personality, his anxious and melancholy disposition has never allowed him to feel at home; to rest content with the world or with himself. 'The best thing to do,' observes Leon Brinson, the adolescent poet in *Opening Day*, who is obviously the author's literary imago—a thinly disguised self-portraiture—'is to make friends with one's self, to reconcile oneself with one's personality, to eliminate the desire to escape from one's self.' This compromise Gascoyne has never effected; never, it would seem, been able to effect; and one might say that the author's life has been one long record of dissatisfaction; of existing in spiritual quarantine; and that his poetry has been the expression of this condition of maladjustment and of his efforts to overcome it.

Loneliness, then—a sense of isolation—has been the poet's

psychological background; and from this background have been developed his reactions of revelation and despair.

To live within oneself, knowing oneself deficient, and yet unable to escape beyond oneself, condemned to a kind of involuntary egoism which is the shipwreck of individual being—of that 'true individuality', residing, as Solovyev puts it, in 'a certain determinate likeness of the unity of the all, a certain determinate mode of receiving and appropriating to oneself all that is other': such is this poet's basic predicament which he has, time and again, expressed. 'Lean forward,' he wrote in a very early poem,

Lean forward, tell me,
. . . Is all my whispering then in vain?
Does no one finite bend an ear
To hear us passing in the night?

and in a poem in his second book of verse, *Man's Life is this Meat,*† he speaks of the sexual aspect of the problem; of the awful erotic seclusion it produces:

Complex *draws tighter like a steel wire mesh*
about the awkward bodies of those born under shame,
striping the tender flesh with blood like tears
flowing; their love they dare not name;
each is divided by desire and fear.

'This is my body, my cell,' he writes in another poem, *The Unattained.*

This is my body, my cell, and I am alone and prone.

Few states of mind, however prevailing—unless they achieve pathological proportion—are without their pendulum-like interruptions, their antithetical intervals. In the poetry of Gascoyne these are observed as interludes of revelation, momentary moods of ecstasy and hope, brief divinations of unity. To employ three somewhat arbitrary terms, we can say that the stations marked by this poet on his journey to the goal of revelation are those of possibility, expectation, and vision.

In his first book of poems, *Roman Balcony*‡ (published when the poet was a mere sixteen) the sense of possibility, of the latent futurity of things, by means of which escape was to be had from a generally undesirable present—from an odious prison of time and place—featured in all the more promising pieces. Sometimes this intuition of release is only indirectly conveyed;

†Published by Parton Press, 1937
‡Published by Temple Bar Publishing Co. Ltd. (Lincoln Williams) 1932

as, for example, by the image of a far-flung star 'at the end of the stairs of the air', 'floating lost'; or where the poet senses in an empty hall 'new possibilities' stirring 'in the dusk'. Sometimes it assumes the form of a question, generally placed at the end of the poem:

Who plays in the empty room
at the foot of the stairs?
Who lit the lamp that burns there,
alone?

and sometimes, in statement or question form, this sense of possibility is equated with the sense of death. In the poem *Fading Avenue* the instincts towards both life and death are quite effectively combined; the conclusion of the poem describing decay, rediscovering life, and finally reverting to the original idea of death; save that, here, the subject of death appears as a discovery intriguing as the first:

But the avenues are fading
and the mould of the flower-beds is sour and dark
and the stems of the shrubs are black
with a sudden ignition of leaves and their tips.

The avenues are fading and sounds drift from afar.
Whose tomb shall we discover
in the dun shade of the woods
at the end of the fading avenues?

These adolescent dialectics, of course, would prove of little interest to us had not Gascoyne possessed the power to develop the themes he treats of here in a deeper intellectual and emotional fashion. Already, in his second book of verse, this vague and flickering sense of possibility was taking on firmer and more precise outlines, and operating within a mind more capable of reading its implications. In doing this, it was changing its nature; and from being an awareness of possibility was becoming a feeling of expectation, a sensation of prescience, of something impending. This ominous half-knowledge in advance, which featured in the best surrealist art of the last five years before 1939, and which by its landscapes of chaos and horror imaginatively prophesied the fate which was to come, is apparent in one of Gascoyne's poems written during his adherence to the movement:

today is the day when the streets are full of hearses
and when women cover their ring fingers with pieces of silk,

when the doors fall off their hinges in ruined cathedrals,
when hosts of white birds fly across the ocean from America
and make their nests in the trees of public gardens
the pavements of cities are covered with needles
the reservoirs are full of human hair

And, here, we may observe that the common dispersal of precision, attendant on surrealist composition, did not overtake this poet as far as the precision of words is concerned. Indeed, the verse written by him at this period is more compact with concrete nouns, with specific adjectives, and localised phrases, than is that of his earlier 'rational' period. (One reads of arms 'like pieces of sand-paper', of a woman who burnt 'the eyes of snails in a candle', of 'shoeleather covered with the vomitings of hedgehogs', and of a queen 'whose fingernails are covered with little drawings of flowers'.)

In another poem in this second book—one of the six non-surrealist pieces—the problem of subjectivity, of what we may call microcosmic self-confinement, begins to be seriously stated and tackled. Here, the poet receives an intimation that his isolation is perhaps unreal; that in spite of the indifferent facade of matter, his life—together with the life of the world—is part of an 'extra-mundane' unity.

Time like an urgent finger moves across the chart,
But you are you, Time is not yours alone,
You are but one dot on the complex diagram.

Then are you a star, a nucleus, centre of moving points?
Are you a rock-crumb, broken from cliff, alone?
Or are you the point of a greater star, moving in unison?
If you are isolate, only a self, then petrify there where you stand;
Destinies crumble and bodies run down, the single sconces burn out,
But you are complete if without you completion is lacking,
Then you burn with the perfect light and are Time's bodyman.

'On the heart's bitter winter shines love's face,' wrote Gascoyne in his second book of verse; and love has always appeared to him as the only solution to his basic problem—the self-incarceration of the introvert spirit. These moments of relief and release from

self, described by him in his second volume, are occasions of sexual and erotic love, or of a physical love of nature—a sort of distracted passionate pantheism, as that which he expresses in his poem *The Unattained*:

And fierce desires swelled up from out my quiet:
To pierce through this flesh outwards, to embrace
The eternal blue, against my nostrils to smother
The fragrant cotton of the clouds; to feel beneath
Impatient soles of feet the grinding grit
Of gravel, the sharp sides of stones; and without end
Against the eyeball's skin to press fresh images,
To lave in the swift stream of forms these avid eyes.

It is not, however, till his third book of verse, *Poems 1937-1942*, that a full, if momentary, escape from self is granted, and therewith expressed in a manner (to me, at least) quite satisfying, both aesthetically and intellectually speaking. And, here, revelation—a vision of escape as well as the sensation of escape itself—is seen to result from the love of God. The Dionysist has turned Christian mystic, though in the one poem from which I shall quote, without any loss of sensuous perception:

Incomprehensible—
O Master—fate and mystery
And message and long promised
Revelation! Murmur of the leaves
Of life's prolific trees in the dark haze
Of midsummer: and inspiration of the blood
In the ecstatic secret bed: and bare
Inscription on a prison wall, 'For thou shalt
persevere
In thine identity . . . .'

By now, I hope to have partly explained and illustrated the poet's main themes; namely, the self-isolation of the spirit, the despair engendered by this auto-ostracism, and, thirdly, an occasional but intense revelation by which the imprisoned self is transcended and a glimpse of the unity of all things vouchsafed.

Interesting as this evolution of Gascoyne's dilemma may appear in itself, I can only repeat that its value for us—its relevance to the study of poetry and not to the study of psychology or ideas—results from the poet's ability to express these fusions of thought and feeling in a verbally satisfying manner; in terms of acoustically self-sufficient speech. This ability the poet had developed by the time he came to publish his fourth book of

verse, *Poems 1937-42*; and in the space at my disposal I can merely indicate a few aspects of this development.

Briefly, the course of Gascoyne's poetry may be described as an attempt to state in preciser and firmer language, by means of more concrete imagery, and generaly in a more 'realistic' fashion, the problems and obsessions which first beset him. This tendency may be studied symptomatically by comparing, for example, the simple line from a poem, *Van Dieren*, in his first book of verse,

The muted bird-songs of the early dawn

with what one may call its teleological extension in the second stanza of *Wartime Dawn* (Poems 1937-42), where the image is expanded to eleven lines of verse as well as gaining in accuracy and outline.

Fearing, as he did, the external world, the temptation to immure himself, creatively speaking, in an ivory-tower must, no doubt, have been strong within the poet; and in his first book, *Roman Balcony*, a number of poems deal with art (with pictures, music, and statuary), or treat of life in a manner already sanctioned by aesthetic convention. This struggle between the ideal and the real is portrayed in the novel, *Opening Day*, where the young aesthetic hero debates with himself. 'There was no calm, no repose, only a glittering restlessness. Yet was it not possible to recede from the visible, to refuse to accept the messages of eye, ear, and all the nagging nerves and senses, to retire into an 'ivory tower', to lose oneself in an endless maze of abstractions? This idea was at variance with his advanced epicurean ideal, the ideal of consciously tasting and extracting from whatever the present moment offered. Confusion that became exasperating . . . was to be defined, to be cut off from surrounding experience and held up as a masterpiece of confusion and exasperation, to be subjectively enjoyed because it was the absolute negation of calm and repose.' From an early date, then, the poet decided to work in a realistic medium; to develop his aesthetic of the inartistic—a realism, as he elsewhere describes it, renouncing his surrealist practice, tempered by 'the wisdom of disillusionment'.

In speaking of Gascoyne's poetry as a species of realism—that art which is generally thought to be concerned with the faithful transcription of outward appearance— it is necessary, here, to attempt to define the poet's own modifying contribution to it. This may be said to consist in the introduction of the symbolic image, a figure whose nature is understood in the light shed by Coleridge when he spoke of the symbol as something existing in

itself and deriving from something greater than that which it represents. As examples of this higher-tension type of imagery, I would quote these lines on the crucified Christ from his poem *Pietà*

> The Mother, whose dead Son's dear head
> Weighs *like a precious blood-incrusted stone*
> *On her unfathomable breast***

or those from *A Wartime Dawn*—both poems taken from his latest book:

> *a moist-tinged blank*
> *Sky like the inside of a deaf-mute's mouth.*

Already, however, in his first volume, Gascoyne had begun to attempt the use of suggestive visual imagery; an imagery describing and implying more than the superfices of those things to which it immediately referred. Thus, in one of his adolescent poems, he writes of the city prostitutes strutting

> *to and fro across the copper bridge*
> *Holding hard iron roses in their hands*
> *With wooden leaves.*

This, on the surface, is junior Dowson—a piece of decorative decadent pastiche, and none the better for being in free-verse. It is also—and especially in terms of promise, whose rare fulfilment is more than once achieved in the work of the poet's latest volume—something quite different to what it seems: the start of an imaginatively clairvoyant art.

DEREK STANFORD

CHAUCER by G. K. CHESTERTON, published by Faber and Faber.

THIS is one of those books, long out of print, which seemed to deserve reprinting, and would have been reprinted long ago were it not for the disinterested malevolence of the bureaucrats of Paper Control.

The book is rather a disappointment. That odd magic exercised by Chesterton, and still potent in his stories and many of his poems, begins here to look a little tawdry. There is so much preparation for every sleight of hand that the rabbit has expired long before the kerchief is whipped away. The involved thought,

**my italics

the approach by devious routes, taxes my patience, where once the verbal display by the wayside aroused my admiration. The book goes a great deal around Chaucer, in order to see him from all sides, but it dallies in the circumambulation to look at a great many things that rather impede our view of Chaucer than embellish his landscape. And there is always an uncomfortable suspicion that the man we are examining is no longer there; that in his place there stands an image, stony and empty, born of Chesterton's mind and endowed with the accepted superficial attributes; bearing in one hand the emblem of Catholic faith, and in the other a multiple lead on the thongs of which strain the great writers of following ages.

There are many verbal felicities, many literary squibs that still go bang, there is, as always in Chesterton, much that is delightful; and, of course, there is by inference a great deal about Chesterton himself.

SEAN JENNETT

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